



Two Brothers

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Vermilion Parish, Louisiana

Henry, LA – Five years ago, when Craig Lee began planning the construction of his Vermilion Parish home, he learned he would be required to elevate his new house more than eight feet above grade in order to receive a building permit. He did not understand the parish's requirement to elevate, because his brother's house was on-grade, on the same piece of land, and in 25 years had never flooded.



"Why so high?" Craig wondered.

In September 2005, Hurricane Rita provided the unfortunate answer to Craig's question. The vicious storm hit the Lee brothers' property with floodwaters 13 feet above sea level. Craig's elevated home stayed dry. The on-grade home of his brother, Keith Lee, was destroyed.

Regarding the Base Flood Elevation requirement, Craig admitted "When they told me I had to go this high, I tried to get around it. Now I'm really glad that I couldn't. [The elevation requirement] saved my house from flooding."

Craig is a carpenter by trade. His wife, Angela, is an administrator at a technical college. They made their home in Henry, Louisiana, because they both grew up in the area and love its peaceful beauty. "It's like a vacation home," said Angela, "except we get to live here year-round...We're really happy here."

Craig elevated his house on reinforced concrete block columns. He anchored the columns two feet below grade, surrounded them with a chain wall, and poured a concrete slab ovetop. He reinforced everything with rebar, beginning beneath the slab, continuing up through the columns and wrapping the floor joists. It cost \$13,000 to elevate the house.

Although his house did not flood, Craig's property suffered some damage during the hurricane. The vinyl and insulation beneath his house were damaged by the harsh wind and wave action. He has since replaced them. The on-grade barn and storage shed were swept away by the storm surge, and he lost eight head of cattle.

"All in all, we were fortunate," said Angela, "...so many of our neighbors lost everything."

"Just about every house around here flooded," Craig added. "A lot of people lost cattle—I know a man who lost over 100 head."

Craig and Angela were fortunate, but they were also well-prepared. Their compliance with Vermilion Parish's current elevation standard paid off.

Keith Lee's house was built 25 years ago, prior to the enactment of the current Base Flood Elevation standard. It was flooded with five to six feet of water during Rita. He considers it a total loss, and his family is relocating to the Lafayette area.

"We managed to get most of our clothes and some valuables up into the attic before we evacuated, but just about everything else is gone," said Keith, standing in front of the wreckage that used to be his home.

The homes of Craig's father and nephew were also destroyed. Angela's father, brother, and grandmother lost their homes. All of these houses were located within five miles of Craig and Angela's property.

Southwestern Louisiana suffered immense damage during Hurricane Rita. Craig and Angela hope never to see anything like it again. They want to encourage everyone in hurricane-prone areas to build as high and strong as possible to protect themselves from future storms.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VI**

State: **Louisiana**

County: **Vermilion Parish**

City/Community: **Henry**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**

Hazard Type: **Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

Activity/Project Type: **Elevation, Structural**

Activity/Project Start Date: **02/2005**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Homeowner**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **2005**

Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.fema.gov>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**

Main Points

- Craig Lee's elevated house withstood Hurricane Rita
- Keith Lee's older house was not elevated; it flooded during Rita and is considered a total loss
- Craig Lee followed Vermillion Parish's building codes



This home survived Hurricane Rita with minimal damage. Photo by Jacob Zuboy, FEMA



Parking area beneath Craig Lee's home.



This home was flooded with 5 to 6 feet of water during Hurricane Rita.



Detail of damage to Keith Lee's home.